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Career Counselling: Current Trends in Research and Theory

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the current trends and tendencies within career counselling research and theories. The author summarises existing career counselling studies as well as makes the case for using A. Giddens' theory of structuration in career counselling analysis.

Key words: career counselling, theories, research, theory of structuration

Introduction

Many researchers in Poland (Kargulowa, 2007, Siarkiewicz, 2010, Szumigraj, 2011, Wojtasik, 2011) and worldwide (Watts, Dartois, Plant, 1987; Sultana, 2009; McLeod, 2003; Savickas, 2001) have noted that the development of institutional forms of career counselling (i.e. career counselling processes that take place in institutions/professional offices/centres) has been accompanied by a growing – and varied – scholastic interest in this social practice. J. McLeod (McLeod, 2003) and Polish researchers (Kargulowa, 2004) have long claimed that, to be adequately analysed and explored, career counselling must be addressed in an interdisciplinary framework. Exploring this human activity requires knowledge of economy, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, religious studies, arts, ecology, theology and anthropology, to name but a few (McLeod, 2003). Counselling, namely, is embedded in multiple, overlapping social contexts.

And yet, it is easily noticeable that a lot of research focuses on selected issues tackled within particular, separate disciplines, such as:

- ♦ psychology (psychology of work, psychology of employment, or organisational psychology etc. The terms used differ across as well as within countries; the literature in English features, for example, *career psychology*,¹ *vocational psychology* [Walsh, Savickas, Hartung, 2013], *occupational*

¹ Cf.: <http://www.thecareerpsychologist.com/> (retrieved on 14. 04. 2012)

psychology,² *counselling psychology*,³ etc.). Psychology, in general, looks into the issues of professional development and professional identity as well as into methods and techniques of supporting people in career development. Actually most, if not all, of the career counselling discourse derives from psychology, as B. Wojtasik notices (Wojtasik, 2011);

- ◆ sociology (including sociology of counselling and psychotherapy propounded by Peter Morall) (2008). In some countries, sociological theories are applied in analyses of social functions of counselling (Lindh, Dahlin, 2000), and in Polish counsellogy they are increasingly used in analyses of counselling defined as a social process and social action (Kargulowa 2007; Szumigraj, 2011);
- ◆ education sciences, which analyse counselling within education systems and in lifelong learning (Piorunek, 2004);
- ◆ HRM (*Human Resources Management*), which studies, for example, vocational reorientation and group layoffs (i.e. *outplacement*), personnel management and counselling for particular vocational groups (Burzyńska, 2010);
- ◆ andragogy (increasingly often), which investigates learning at workplace and the significance of work in lifelong learning, seeking to develop andragogical counselling (Kargulowa, 2006);
- ◆ counsellogy (Polish theory of counselling. The term was originally proposed by Thomas Wilson and Aaron B. Stills [Wilson, Stills, 1981], but it was not adopted by the academic community. Currently, it is in circulation also in South Korea, where, like in Poland, it denotes a science of counselling [Kim, 2011]). The sub-discipline seems to produce the most comprehensive analyses of counselling with strong theoretical underpinnings (Bilon, 2010).

Tony Watts, Jean Guichard, Peter Plant and María Luisa Rodríguez (1994), who were researching career counselling in the European Community in the 90s, observed that career counsellors rooted their professional identity in the (sub)discipline in which they had done their vocational training (Watts, Guichard, Plant, Rodríguez, 1994). It is neither a novelty nor a surprise that a similar tendency is observable among counselling researchers. The issues they explore, the methodology they work with, the interpretive approach to research outcomes they adopt are all largely dependent on the discipline within which they analyse counselling. Another, rather obvious, general tendency is that research models are diversified within particular countries/geographical regions. In very broad lines, both generalising and diagnostic research is conducted (cf. Nowak, 1985).

² Cf. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* published by the American Psychological Association.

³ Cf. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* published by the American Psychological Association.

Below, I survey current trends and tendencies in career counselling research and theory. Because the theme is highly complex, I will only indicate what issues the research is preoccupied with and what its dominant theoretical and methodological frameworks are.

Career Counselling and Guidance Research

Career counselling is a multilayered and multifaceted field in which scholars identify a whole array of research problems. To systematise it, we should remember that the term “career counselling” consists of two components, which have contributed to a dynamic development of research on both career itself as well as counselling. Hence, career counselling research and theory seem to have evolved along parallel lines. On the one hand, contemporary researchers draw on the findings of psychological counselling research and psychotherapy, and, on the other, they devise their own theories and models of career counselling.

Research focused on career itself (vocational life or career development) seeks to answer the following questions:

- ◆ what does contemporary career mean?,
- ◆ how does an individual’s career develop today? (also: what transitions do people experience today?),
- ◆ what career patterns are observable in the modern world?,
- ◆ what implications do contemporary social changes (globalisation, economic crisis, technological development, migrations, neoliberal policies, etc.) have for people’s vocational and non-vocational lives? (Bańka, Internet website).

The research that seeks to answer these questions can be located in two major trends. One of them is the *classical trend* (explained below), in which research is done as if “within” the heretofore dominant paradigm, with “paradigm” understood not in terms of a scientific model as proposed by Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn, 1963), but rather as a totality of ways in which the social reality, including counselling practice, are perceived and made sense of. The research within the classical trend assumes that career development is a linear process and draws on classical theories, such as psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive and trait theories enumerated by A. Bańka (Bańka, 2004). One example of such research is provided by the plentiful analyses of *career decision-making*, based on Donald Super’s theories and, consequently, foregrounding the role of career planning, preparedness for making vocational decisions, etc. (Hirschi, Läge, 2007).

The other trend is the *critical trend* (explained below). The most pertinent and concise definition of such research (and theories) is provided by Savickas (Savickas, 2003, pp. 87-96), who states that career counselling research studies (and theorises)

an individual's adjustment to the environment or, as Portuguese researchers put it, a human being's "adaptation" or "socialisation" to the current socio-economic conditions, human development and social learning processes (Savickas, 2003; Santos, Ferreira, 1998). At the same time, Savickas observes, contemporary researchers deconstruct, so to say, the concepts of both career and professional development. Postmodern scholars tend to address "the place of work in people's life" rather than "career" (Savickas, 2003, p. 89). Instead of "career development," they tend to discuss "career management" (Savickas, 2003) or career construction (Savickas, 2011). T. Watts coined the phrase "career quake" to describe current changes in people's careers, which he sees as necessitating a redefinition of career. According to him, career could be described as "the individual's lifelong progression in learning and work" (Watts, 1998, p. 2).

The concept of "constructing" one's career is most fully expressed in a recently formulated seminal paradigm called a life-design counselling theory. It conceives of career in very broad terms, assuming that people's contemporary careers are contextual (or, strictly speaking, career development opportunities are contextually conditioned), dynamic (it is a dynamic process), non-linear, multiperspectival and comprised of personal patterns (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239).

The above survey of contemporary approaches to career seems to reflect a consensus on career as such that critical researchers have attained. (Evidently, contemporary careers involve new patterns and courses which diverge from those valid at the beginning of the 20th century.) It outlines also the main themes addressed by career counselling researchers over the recent years. Career has been studied, among others, by Savickas (Savickas, 2003), Watts (Watts, 2012) and Hopson (Hopson, 2009) (and many other researches worldwide); in Poland career has been researched by Wojtasik (Wojtasik, 2003), Bańka (Bańka, 2005), Szumigraj (Szumigraj, 2003), Minta (Minta, 2012), Cybal-Michalska (Cybal-Michalska, 2013) and others.

Because research on the very process of counselling actually "comprises" the study of the career counselling process (Kargulowa, 2007, p. 43), I will not isolate research on career counselling from research on counselling as such. The significance of counselling research (and theory) for research on career counselling is asserted also by Patton and McMahon, who underscore that career counselling has "evolved" from career theory and counselling theory (Patton, McMahon, 2006). I will mention only that counselling research and theory (or, more precisely, research on and theories of various species of counselling) worldwide are unmistakably embedded in psychological approaches and are underpinned by the idea that counselling is an interpersonal interaction. Counsellogy, in turn, views counselling as both an interpersonal relation and a process of social life (Bilon, 2010).

The tendency to create separate models/concepts of career counselling may be caused, firstly, by a rapid development of discourse on career counselling and, secondly, by the growing emphasis on the distinction between counselling and psychotherapy (McLeod 2003). There is also another cause: as Bańka asserts, none of

the classical psychological theories “provides sufficient basis for constructing counselling practice in conditions of contemporary mutability of careers” (Bańka, 2004). Bańka insists thereby that nearly all socio-cultural contexts of career counselling have undergone radical changes.

Current research on career counselling is driven by the following questions:

- ◆ what is contemporary career counselling? (What are its indicators and characteristic features?),
- ◆ what theories does contemporary career counselling need?,
- ◆ what is the role of career counselling in the contemporary world? (or: How can career counselling respond to the challenges posed by the socio-political realities?),
- ◆ how should the counselling process proceed? (therein: How should this process be organised – on the personal interaction level and on the systemic level – to be available and accessible to all?),
- ◆ what competencies should a counsellor possess?,
- ◆ what methods are effective in counselling practice?,
- ◆ who is a contemporary counselee? (biographical studies of people seeking career counselling, including research on cultural differences).

Those questions do not sound novel at all, which is hardly surprising because the whole discourse on career counselling so far has focused on such queries in this way or another. Yet contemporary researchers, such as the founders of the life-design counselling approach, stress that “current approaches are insufficient. First, they are rooted in assumptions of personal characteristics and secure jobs in bounded organizations. Second, they conceptualize careers as a fixed sequence of stages. Concepts such as vocational identity, career planning, career development, and career stages are used to predict people’s adjustment to work environments assuming a relatively high stability of the environments and people’s behavior” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 240). At the threshold of the 21st century, counselling researchers (and practitioners) seem to be facing the challenge of re-defining several key issues, terms and notions.

Savickas (2003) insists that 21st-century career counselling should:

- a) „expand the purview of its theories beyond the traditional focus on the vocational behavior of White, middle-class men and should incorporate greater awareness of and sensitivity to race, sex and culture,”
- b) concentrate more on adults besides its attention to vocational decision-making by youth,
- c) disseminate a holistic approach to roles adopted in life and underscore “life structure counseling,”
- d) fuse theories of professional development into a cohesive and all-inclusive whole,

- e) attend to the anxieties that employees are exposed to in work-related contexts and „soothe the anguish and ills experienced” by them (Savickas, 2003, p. 89).

Noticeably, all the tasks which Savickas sees as responsibilities of career counselling are, in a sense, also themes dealt with in contemporary career counselling research, corresponding to various trends within it. We could thus distinguish the following categories of issues addressed by counselling research (and theories):

- ◆ importance of multiculturalism in counselling,
- ◆ lifelong career counselling,
- ◆ feasibility of holistic research integrating existing research trends and outcomes obtained in counselling research so far.

Still, this approach is to a large extent rooted in the idea of counselling as an interpersonal interaction. Consequently, it is worth stressing a number of important problems which are highlighted in the sociologically or anthropologically informed career counselling research. They include, for example:

- ◆ the political dimension of career counselling, which seems to have been particularly important in recent years. This focus is clearly visible in the OECD-organised research which aimed to look into “how the organisation, management, and delivery of career guidance can help to advance some key public policy objectives. In particular (...) how career guidance services can assist countries to advance lifelong learning goals, and how (...) career guidance can help in the implementation of active labour market policies” (OECD, 2004, p. 3). Other issues frequently discussed in this context include assessment of career counselling effectiveness, particularly for counselling provided within educational systems and counselling for the unemployed (Gikopoulou, 2008);
- ◆ comparative studies of career counselling patterns (organisation and procedures) worldwide. In recent years, as R. Sultana emphasises, many important comparative research projects have been launched (Sultana, 2006), targeting, especially, the systemic solutions (Sultana, Watts 2006) and professionalisation of counselling (Cedefop, 2009). Elsewhere, R. Sultana reports that comparative research has been recently conducted by the OECD, the European Union and the World Bank (Sultana, 2010);
- ◆ applicability of theoretical solutions in practice (research on the effective methods to be used by counsellors). This issue surfaces repeatedly because many researchers have noticed a peculiar “rupture” or “incompatibility”, to use Marcin Szumigraj’s formulations (Szumigraj, 2011, pp. 215-216). It consists in difficulties arising upon applying the theoretically developed tools in practice. In some countries, researchers seek to identify the causes of such a mismatch;

- ♦ critical analyses of career counselling in which the role of power in counselling is foregrounded (Mielczarek, 2009; Szumigraj, 1998) and the role of career counselling in the contemporary world is critically assessed. Some Danish researchers, for example, have dubbed career counselling as “social control in a velvet glove.” They insist that, at least in Denmark, the responsibilities of career counselling include, on the one hand, assisting people in finding their place in social life and, on the other, pursuing general societal goals, whereby career counselling policy-makers (who always act upon a political agenda) can in a way “steer” vocational paths in ways they deem desirable (Plant, Thomsen, 2012). Certainly, this holds true not only for Denmark. In Poland, M. Szumigraj first called career counselling “a subtle instrument of power” (Szumigraj, 1998) and later claimed that career counselling in the industrial era was to “put a right person in a right place” (Szumigraj, 2011, p. 46, cf. Drabik-Podgórna, 2005).

Viewed from the perspective of contemporary criticism of the social order (Saad-Filho, Johnston, 2005), career counselling seems now to serve to put each person on the side of “flexibility,” “employability,” “entrepreneurship,” “personal responsibility,” etc. At the same time, the character of the contemporary labour market invalidates any “certain” path of development. Given this, career counselling can legitimately be viewed as a tool for reproducing the (neoliberal) social order.

Career counselling research is sometimes financed by the World Bank, which substantiates the idea that career counselling is a neoliberal policy instrument, which paradoxically stimulates its development. The paradoxical nature of the arrangements now in place consists in the fact that neoliberal policies are premised on the withdrawal of the state from the “caring” and helping functions, while at the same time the social realities (e.g. growing unemployment rates and exacerbating social inequalities) compel investments in the development of career counselling. Another paradoxical facet of the situation is that career counselling (conceived as a form of social help), which to some extent has “fallen victim” to neoliberal social policies, functions at the same time as an instrument in these very policies. A. Kargulowa calls this process “the appropriation” of the counselling discourse by the economic discourse (Kargulowa, 2007). We could say that one of the causes of the appropriation is a gradual evolution of neoliberal notions, which started as a purely economic concept only to become a comprehensive concept of the social order (Saad-Filho, Johnston, 2005).

As I have tried to show, contemporary career counselling abounds in issues which attract research attention. Of course, the survey of themes and research trends/tendencies is far from exhaustive. To present all of them fully would require separate studies. Below, I will briefly describe theoretical and methodological frameworks used in current research.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks in Career Counselling Research

Scrutinising the development of counsellogy in Poland and the array of methods it relies on, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz has traced a specific shift “from the pursuit of an epistemological certainty to the coming to terms with epistemological uncertainty” (Siarkiewicz, 2010, pp. 14-28). Drawing on her observations, we could say that:

- ♦ a paradigm shift has taken place in Polish counsellogy in parallel to similar changes occurring in the humanities and social sciences;
- ♦ the paradigm shift was an outcome of multiple transformations that affected societies worldwide;
- ♦ the “pursuit of epistemological certainty” paradigm in career counselling research focused largely on diagnosing counselling/guidance-provision practice (including the diagnoses of the current state of counselling, its development and the methods used by counsellors), predicting (the directions of counselling development and counselees’ professional development), and proposing methodological solutions to be applied by counsellors (Siarkiewicz, 2010, p. 17). As already mentioned, the paradigm presupposed stability of social systems and professional lives, although as early as in the 80s of the 20th century this tenet came to be regarded as one of the paradigm’s “shortcomings” (Collin, Young, 1986);
- ♦ the “coming to terms with epistemological uncertainty” paradigm in career counselling acknowledges the subjectivity and the “micro-scale” status of the counselling interaction, the contextual embedment of this relationship, its ambiguities and situatedness in the everyday (Siarkiewicz, 2010, pp. 22-30). Both social structures and people’s professional development are considered unstable, uncertain and unpredictable.

The paradigmatic shift in counselling research has occurred not only in Polish counsellogy. Most career counselling researchers across the world have discerned decisive transformations in their approaches.

Before I analyse theoretical approaches and methodologies informing contemporary career counselling research, I would like to address a peculiar “inconsistency” that inheres in the scientific discourse, in general. On the one hand, namely, researchers keep underscoring the seminal paradigmatic shift in career counselling research, yet on the other, as already mentioned, counselling research and practice are still largely devoted to devising effective methods, proper working modes, etc. At the same time, the current discourse and research have by no means abandoned analysing the efficacy of counselling, predicting its development, or anticipating career developments. Moreover, the abovementioned observations of the Danish researchers (Plant, Thomsen, 2012) imply that current counselling is hardly “free” from the goals that were attributed to it in the modernist paradigm. The pressures

exercised by policy-makers force career counselling to continue pursuing general societal functions, the difference being that now the responsibility for success in life is borne by an individual alone (Johnston, 2009, p. 221, Potulicka, Rutkowiak, 2010). Furthermore, the imperative that individuals adjust to the current labour market is increasingly reinforced in many countries all over the world. As such goals and expectations are usually associated with the positivistic paradigm, it seems that the paradigms distinguished by Siarkiewicz are actually both operatively at work now.

That the two aforementioned paradigms (the paradigm of “epistemological certainty” the paradigm of “epistemological uncertainty”) are coextensive can be also inferred from the types of publications on counselling. Stead, Perry, Munka, Bonnett, Shibana and Care report that between 1999 and 2009 among papers published in 11 leading journals on career counselling and development⁴ 55,9 % were based on quantitative empirical research, and further 35,5% were theoretical studies unrelated to qualitative research (Stead et al., 2012). The outcomes of their research in which they content-analysed more than 3.000 articles indicate that although the methodological trends and theoretical research tenets described below are undoubtedly valid, a substantial portion of the international discourse is founded upon the quantitative research premises.

Drawing on A. Giddens’s theory of structuration as a theoretical framework for analysis of current research, and thus concurring with him that “quantitative and qualitative methods should be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic” (Giddens, 1986, p. 334), I follow many authors (Malewski, 1997) in attributing the genesis of quantitative research to the positivistic paradigm. That the two paradigms coexist can be in some ways related to the fact that, as Kargulowa notices, counselling processes involve many social actors, and among them “organisers of social life” (Kargulowa, 2012, p. 21). This group includes political decision-makers, who largely regulate the ways in which not only counsellors but also social life researchers act in the world of “neoliberal globalization”⁵ (Moore, Kleinman, Hess, Frickel, 2011).

The paradigm shift in career counselling studies entails primarily recognising and adopting new theoretical perspectives and qualitative research methods and, in counselling practice, abandoning the directive counselling model (Wojtasik, 2003)

⁴ The authors analysed articles published in the following scholarly journals: *The Australian Journal of Career Development*, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *The Career Development*, *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Journal of Career Development*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *The Counseling Psychologist*.

⁵ Although the authors do notice many opportunities for development of science in the era of globalisation and the neoliberal social order, they nevertheless stress the impact of the current political-economic forces on scholarship.

and developing narrative tools to be applied in work with the counselee (Minta, 2012).

In recent theoretical approaches to career counselling, the paradigm shift importantly heralded the spread of the **constructivist framework**, which, as Bimrose puts it, means the perspective “which assumes that we construct and perpetuate our social realities.” Bimrose goes on to point out that constructivism in career counselling has brought about new ways of perceiving both career as such and counselling interactions.⁶ Because constructivism itself and its application are described in detail in the Polish and foreign literature (Savickas, 1995; Law, 2007; McMahon, Patton, 2004; Gołębnik, 2009; Kłodkowska, 2010; Kłodkowska, 2013), I will only refer to it here as an approach used in the current career counselling research.

Constructivism keeps developing and invites various interpretations. But constructivism itself can be criticised for neglecting somewhat social and societal factors (and impacts) in individual life and overrating the importance of human agency (Giddens 2003). Therefore, for example, McMahon, Patton and Watson’s theory proposes to analyse career counselling within the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Career Counselling. The STF is regarded as a “metatheoretical account of career development” (McMahon, Patton, Watson, 2004, p. 14). As to describe the theory in detail exceeds the scope of this paper, I will only reproduce here a figure provided by the authors to represent how career is conceived in this theory. This theory, “is construed as an overarching framework within which all concepts of career development described in the plethora of career theories can be usefully positioned and utilized in theory and practice” (McMahon, Patton, 2006, p. 153). Consequently, the figure includes many social influences. Admittedly, despite many attempts at reflecting the phenomena related to the career development process, it is difficult to capture such a complex process in one figure.

⁶ J. Bimrose, *Constructivist Approaches & Narrative Counselling*, at: <http://www.guidance-research.org/EG/impprac/ImpP2/new-theories/constructivism> (retrieved on 17.03.2013).

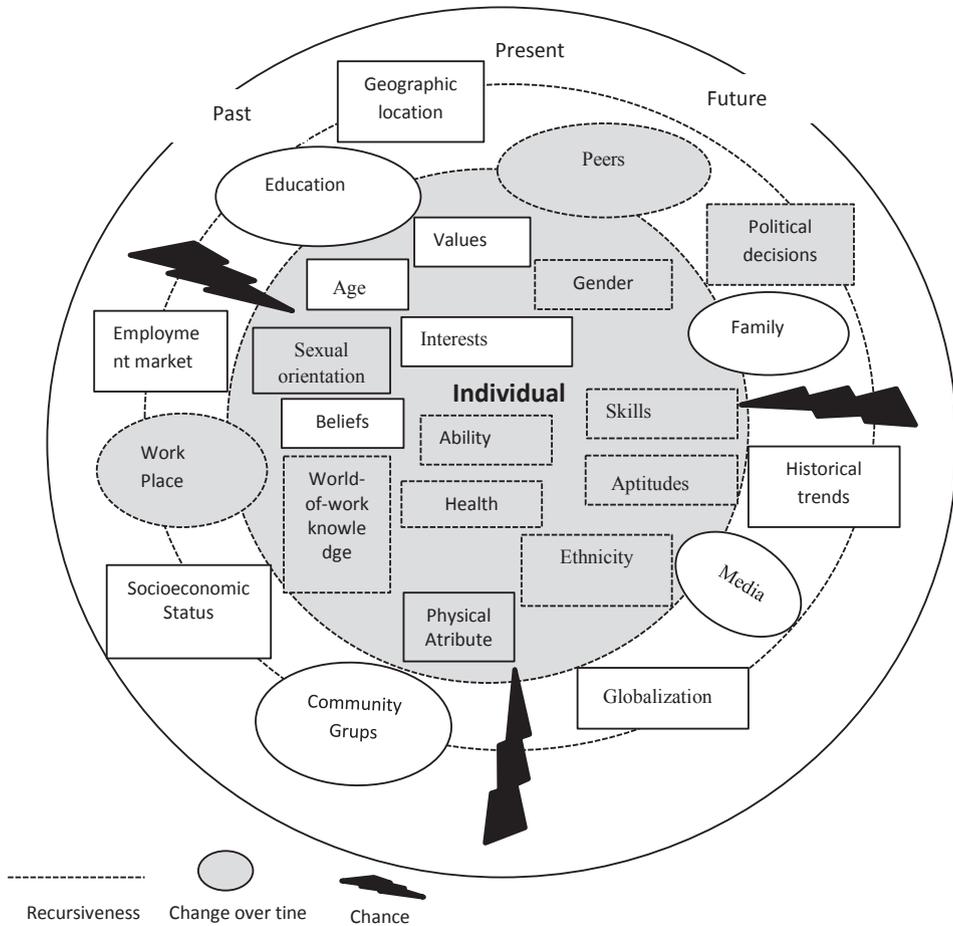


Fig. 1 Career in the STF, source: W. Patton, M McMahon, *Career Development and Systems Theory: A New Relationship*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1999.

Another constructivism-inspired theoretical approach which, in fact, goes beyond it in a specific manner is the “**dialogical self**” theory developed by Hubert Hermans and his associates and used in career counselling with increasing frequency. The theory presupposes that human identity comprises various, relatively autonomous self-positions. Hubert J. M. Hermans, Harry J. G. Kempen and Rens J. P. van Loon claim that this theory differs from other theories of the self in that it extends beyond individualism and rationalism and considerably diverges from the Cartesian *cogito*. The relatively autonomous “selves” make up “a dynamic multiplicity of (...) I positions” which remain in continual dialogue (Hermans, Kempen, van Loon, 1992, pp. 28-29). Because the theory foregrounds dialogue and narrative as important factors in identity development, it often serves as a framework for

interpretations of current career counselling, which places a great value on dialogue and narratives that the counselees construct.

The chaos theory is another approach to career counselling (or a theoretical interpretive framework of research) on the rise at present. It is used in analysis of current career patterns (Bright, Pryor, 2005), of contemporary counselling models and of counsellors' working methods. Robert G. L. Pryor, Norman E. Amundson and Jim E. H. Bright claim that the Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) assumes first of all that the more complicated the social realities are, the more unpredictable incidents they will generate. This has consequences for individual lives in that the options/events one faces in life represent but one of a range of possibilities. As all components of the social reality are closely interconnected, an alteration in one of them may severely affect any of the remaining ones. The authors believe that such assumptions have rather serious implications for career counselling, which is required to take a number of new factors into account. Hence, they elaborate a comprehensive career counselling model based on this theory (Pryor, Amundson, Bright, 2008). In Poland, the chaos theory is used in career counselling research by M. Szumigraj, although he does not apply it to analysing career patterns (Szumigraj, 2011, p. 194) as well as Sarzyńska-Mazurek (Sarzyńska-Mazurek, 2013).

Career counselling is also studied within frameworks provided by **sociological theories** proposed by such thinkers as Bourdieu and Giddens. They are applied predominantly in the Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden (Lindh, Dahlin, 2000), Norway (Inglar, 2011) and Iceland (Vilhjálmsson, 2012), as well as in Poland⁷. Adopting the sociological interpretive framework for career counselling, researchers come to view career counselling as a social process, which is a particularly prominent tendency in Polish counsellogy. This is actually the main difference between **counsellogy** and other theoretical approaches in counselling studies (Bilon, 2010). Counsellogists perceive counselling (including career counselling) not only as an interpersonal interaction, but also as a social system, a social process and an element of social work (Kargulowa, 2007).

The paradigm shift in career counselling triggered also changes in research methods and techniques. G. B. Stead, J. C. Perry, L. M. Munka, H. R. Bonnett, A. P. Shibani and E. Care (already referred to in the foregoing) report that "the qualitative projects and methods most frequently used by researchers include:

- ◆ case study,
- ◆ grounded theory,
- ◆ content analysis,
- ◆ narrative inquiry,
- ◆ consensual qualitative research (CQR),
- ◆ phenomenology,

⁷ For example, Michał Mielczarek from the University of Lower Silesia uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to analyse operations of job centres.

- ◆ action research and participatory/collaborative research,
- ◆ biographical research,
- ◆ ethnographic studies.

The interview is clearly the most frequently applied technique” (Stead et al., 2012, p. 115). Strikingly, the authors report that only 6,3% of the 3279 articles they analysed in the leading journals devoted to career and career counselling were based on qualitative empirical research, and merely 0,4% of the papers were theoretical studies related to qualitative methods (Stead et al., 2012, p. 112).

Recapitulating the analysis of current tendencies in career counselling research and theories, I would like to highlight a few issues:

- ▶ Research understood as a human activity and a process of social life displays inclinations both toward unification and toward differentiation. They make for many similarities observable in research tendencies and, at the same time, for equally noticeable regional differences. Although, worldwide, vocational psychology (and its diverse “versions”) is an overriding force in career counselling research, there are regions, such as Scandinavia and Poland for instance, where counselling is investigated within more comprehensive research frameworks.
- ▶ The taxing challenge of a paradigmatic “transition” is evident all over the world. Most research is conducted on the basis of quantitative methods. G. B. Stead, J. C. Perry, L. M. Munka, H. R. Bonnett, A. P. Shiban and E. Care show that also in career counselling research there is a distinct tendency to combine quantitative and qualitative methods rather than rely on qualitative methods only. Essentially, hardly any variations were noted in the trend between 1999 to 2009. Even if in 2007 more articles were published based on the mixed quantitative-qualitative empirical model, it was coterminous with an increase in quantitative research and not in qualitative studies (Stead et al., 2012, p. 113).
- ▶ The current career counselling research clearly tends to **promote** not only qualitative research frameworks but also working methods based on biographical analysis, narrative approaches, etc. The preference is reflected in the founding of international bodies, such as organisations or research teams, committed to the improvement of such methods. This development may have been propelled also by the pronounced focus on and appreciation of career counselling displayed by the European Union since 2004 (European Lifelong Guidance Policy, 2010; Drzażdżewski, 2008). The European engagement with career counselling fosters exploration of new research approaches and practical solutions in career counselling.
- ▶ The promoted approaches/concepts are underpinned by constructivist views, albeit constructivism as such induces considerable criticism.⁸ The frequently

⁸ Cf., e.g. P. Bołtuć, „Konstruktywizm w e-edukacji oraz jego krytyka” [„Towards a Critique of Constructivism in E-Education”], at: <http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/artykul/index/numer/41/id/863> (retrieved on 18.05.2013).

cited anti-constructivist charges include inadequate recognition of social (and systemic) factors (conditioning) and excessive emphasis on people's agency. These seem particularly misconceived in the era of the economic crisis and "shrinking labour opportunities" (Szkudlarek, 2005), in which an individual exerts only very limited influence on his/her employment options and success of his/her business ventures.

Career Counselling and Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory

In the previous sections I have indicated a range of attempts to find alternative theories for analysis of social phenomena and a tendency to apply sociological (and other) theories in accounts of career counselling. Below, I will interpret career counselling, adopting the perspective of A. Giddens's structuration theory. A similar approach to career counselling research is taken up also by Tron Ingar from Norway and Stephen R. Barley (Barley, 2004), but they focus on other dimensions of this theory. Ingar's research assumes that career counselling is predominantly an interpersonal interaction, and Barley focuses on career research.

In his *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jonathan H. Turner states that A. Giddens's theory of structuration is one of the most creative theoretical insights of the second half of the 20th century (Turner, 2004, p. 570) and his greatest contribution to sociological thought. The thrust of this theory lies in that, as Agnieszka Kołodziej-Durnaś claims, Giddens proposes "a series of transgressions, that is, crossing a number of boundaries which social theory has demarcated across various planes. In doing that, he abolishes several dualisms" (Kołodziej-Durnaś, 2004, p. 99). The crucial dualisms that Giddens emphatically opposes include:

- ◆ macrosociology vs. microsociology,
- ◆ subjectivism vs. objectivism,
- ◆ realism vs. nominalism,
- ◆ structure vs. action,
- ◆ voluntarism vs. determinism,
- ◆ quantitative vs. qualitative methods (Kołodziej-Durnaś, 2004, pp. 99-101).

Giddens proposes to look at society anew with novel ontological and ontic premises, and, consequently, to revise the social sciences (he devotes ample attention to epistemological issues) and to re-examine the place of theory in them (Giddens, 2003).

According to J. H. Turner, the theory of structuration is a cluster of sensitizing concepts only loosely connected with each other, in which *structuration* is the key notion designed so as to convey *the duality of structure* (Turner, 2004, p. 573). These results, as Turner noticed in the 80s of the 20th century, from the fact that Giddens "denied" the social sciences the possibility of formulating abstract laws (Turner,

1986, p. 970). Emphatically, like other researchers who have relied on the theory of structuration in their research (e.g. Kołodziej-Durnaś, 2004, pp. 88-98), I believe that **the theory of structuration can be both a theoretical framework for analysing the conducted research and a research method**, though to serve the latter end, it must be interpreted and operationalised.

By applying the theory of structuration to career counselling research, we can show that:

- ◆ from the structuration perspective, career counselling is a “patterned” social practice, and, thus, a social system;
- ◆ as a social system, it consists of rules and resources which are used in the process of its structuration. They constitute its structure, actually, the „effect” of which is the institutional order;
- ◆ the structure of the counselling system is marked by a duality, which means that on the one hand it “forms” the subjects’ actions (leading to the reproduction of social practices), and on the other it is also produced by them. The structural duality lies at the core of understanding career counselling. Career counselling is neither an immediate result of particular subjects’ actions nor an entity which can exist without them. The relationship between the subjects and the counselling system/structure is always reciprocal.

The reciprocity is illustrated in the figure below:

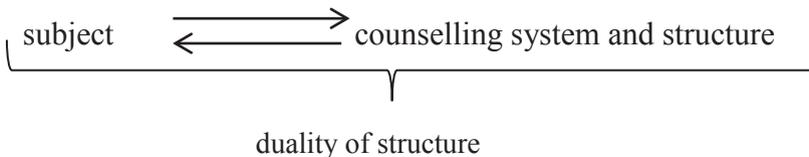


Figure 2. Duality of the career counselling system structure, based on A. Giddens, *Constitution...*, *op. cit.*

- ◆ the subjects that participate in the structuration process can be “vehicles of information” about the counselling system as rules are inscribed in their practical consciousness and regulate their actions;
- ◆ however, because the subjects are not only passive “social actors.” they continually engage in reflexive monitoring of their own actions;
- ◆ the subjects adopt various strategies vis-à-vis the rules (and resources) of structuration, which do not always bring about the expected outcomes, because the consequences of action tend to be unpredictable and uncontrollable;

- ◆ examination of rules and resources of structuration and strategies adopted by particular subjects in the process of “coming into being” will basically speaking result in revealing the abovementioned duality of structure;
- ◆ the duality of structure is a specific “engine” of structuration of career counselling practices, with the counselling institutional order being its outcome. I assume, thereby, that structuration of career counselling is a dialectical relationship of rules (and resources), strategies adopted by the subjects and their actions;
- ◆ integration of the career counselling system equals its cohesion/coherence.

Very generally speaking, the theory of structuration helps solve a crucial dilemma bound up with investigating structuration of systems and answer the question: How should systems be researched? Its major advantage is that A. Giddens undertook to abolish the individual/social system dichotomy. Within this framework, a researcher is in a way “authorised” to describe systems, drawing on research conducted on particular individuals, without in the least undercutting the importance of any of these elements, which is what the “orthodox theories” (such as structuralism, functionalism and so-called *Verstehen* theories) do, according to Giddens (Giddens, 1986, pp. 1-25). The theory of stucturation offers thus “a third way” both in theoretical assumptions and in methodological choices (Kołodziej-Durnaś, 2004). That we urgently need “a third way” is evidenced by the already quoted research outcomes reporting that career counselling research increasingly relies on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods rather than on qualitative research frameworks (Stead et al. 2009).

Besides, I believe that the “classical” sociological theories help interpret career counselling so as to capture its complexity and multifaceted nature. It is particularly important in comparative studies of career counselling in Poland and abroad. The “systemic” theories, such as A. Giddens’s theory of structuration, help a researcher penetrate into more contexts and aspects/dimensions of counselling, exactly because they conceptualise whole societies. Career counselling, we must remember, is deeply embedded in the cultural context, which R. Sultana and many other counselling researchers keep reiterating (cf. Bańka, 2004; Drabik-Podgórna, 2005; Sultana, 2009; Szumigraj, 2011).

(Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatowska)

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